4: Barth E-5 (1951) 1953 MAl Iran
Kurd MAll
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the Kurdish tribal system poses some unusual problems in this field. In the travel literature, Kurdish tribes have a deserved reputation as warriors and bandits with little respect for human life, and without further analysis of the situation it has been assumed that much of their activities in this field is governed by a pattern of blood feuding. There is however good reason to analyse the situation more carefully, to discover just what patterns relating to homicide do in fact exist.

K 621 [181]

The material on which the following is based is, for obvious reasons, very incomplete. Today homicide is the matter with which the external administration is most concerned, and immediate intervention on its part tends to prevent other action from being taken, or fear of such intervention prevents actual case histories from being discussed. All the data that I do have, however, indicates the absence or very weak development of blood feuding patterns in Southern Kurdistan. This absence may seem surprising, and it is necessary to make clear just what is meant by the statement.

K 628 I 656 682

It seems useful in the analysis of this phenomenon to adhere to a fairly specific defintion of what is meant by institutionalized blood feud. In its most characteristic form, it has been described in numerous African societies, e. g. the Nuba (Nadel 1947): «In Heiban [homicide] entails blood feud, which is carried on until exact revenge has been achieved; a man must be killed for a man, a woman for a woman; even in their age the two must be as closely matched as possible. The duty to avenge devolves, not on an individual, but on the whole clan . . . . Again, the revenge is not directed against an individual — the murderer himself — but against any member of the enemy clan who satisfies the conditions of this law of revenge . . .», p. 151). The pattern is thus a special form of institutionalized revenge, whereby a whole group of persons is held collectively responsible for the behavior of one of its members, and where the wronged party is similarly not conceived as the individual or his close family, but as the whole larger group to which he belonged. The reaction is one of retaliation, governed by considerations of equality, and subsidiarily one of compensation by traditionally stipulated blood money (e. g. ibid. p. 251).

K 628

In this form, the blood feud is not found in Southern Kurdistan.

K 56

578 lead to one side burning the other's crops or stealing their cattle.
628 Until bloodshed has occurred nothing is serious and a good elan Aghs will
[684] see to it that the parties submit to arbitration before the affair
681 reaches a crisis. More serious are affairs in which women are involved; an insult to honour can only be wiped out by death and the discovery of adultery can have only one possible sequel. Such cases however need not necessarily lead to feud; if the guilty lover belongs to the same village as the injured husband a single murder is considered to settle the matter. If the parties are from different groups however the affair is much more serious and several assassinations may take place before settlement can be reached. Eventually, provided it is the honour of commoners rather than of Aghas that is at stake, the Aghas concerned will arrange feud through the mediation of the tribal chiefs. According to Hay "A blood feud is usually settled by the payment of blood-money; every condition of man or woman has his or her price, and even the parts of the body are catalogued. A Kurmanji or middle class Kurdish farmer is valued at £90, one of his women at £45, and his leg or arm at say £20. Such payment is often made in kind, some cattle or a horse, or so much wheat being handed over to the aggrieved party. It is very common for a girl to be given away in marriage in payment of blood money. Thus if £90 were owing, the price of the blood of one m n the debt might be paid by the delivery of one girl, three cows and a donkey". I have no comparable information, though I think the general principle is accurately described. In Hay's time the Government could seldom apprehend a murderer. He says "For the murdered man's relations to take their revenge is quite in order, but an execution at the hands of that monster, the Government, is an entirely different matter. The culprit therefore is carefully concealed until he can make good his escape to the hills". The position today is somewhat different and I fancy the murderer is usually caught. This however does not end the feud; blood feud murders are punishable only by two years imprisonment and the war starts again when the culprit gets free.*

628 As has been explained the feuds of commoners and the less important Aghas are settled in the end by tribal arbitration. Moreover

628 * The Administration makes a distinction between feud murders
684 justified by tribal custom and ordinary murders which are not. The
Iraq former come under a special code for which the maximum penalty is two
678 years imprisonment; the latter come under the ordinary Iraq criminal code
• 681 for which the penalty is much more severe (? death). This has had an interesting repercussion. In the old days by tribal custom an affair of honour was adequately settled if the man only was killed, the woman in the case being merely driven out of her own community to fend for herself. Today it is necessary for the avenging husband to prove to the Authorities that it is really an affair of honour and not just a cold blooded murder. The custom now therefore is to kill both the guilty parties.

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Moreover

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nowadays the Government takes an active interest in the proceedings and by threat of dire and awful penalties is usually able to settle the affair near the start. Much more serious is a feud in which important tribal leaders are involved; here settlement is extremely difficult and assassinations may apparently continue for generations. One such major feud splits the Rawandiz district at the present time and has become so widespread that the contestants have assumed the scale and significance of political parties. Practically everyone I met seemed to be involved on one side or the other, some as active assassins, others, the majority, merely as intriguers. The term "my enemies" was clearly highly elastic; - as far as I could judge there was no particular distinction between mere political opponents and those one was prepared to assassinate. The allegiance of the more remote contestants is doubtless largely determined by kinship considerations, but this is not always obvious. A nephew of Hamid Agin of Bergala who had been shot in the back a year before was quite closely related to both of the principal contestant families; and there seemed to be no obvious reason why he should be campaigning on one side rather than the other.

When this particular feud started is not clear, but it was already well established in 1918 and May mentions it a number of times; the most recent murder of the sequence occurred the day after I left Rawandiz. The murderer had come out of prison three days before, having been gaoled two years previously on account of an earlier assassination. My records on the subject are certainly very incomplete but even so they show a considerable casualty record:-

Descendants and Relatives of Hamil Agha - 5 dead, 2 wounded, 2 in prison.

Descendants and Relatives of Abdulla Pasha - 4 dead.

Today the affair has become entangled with all sorts of wider issues - Kurdish Nationalism in particular. Accusations of being pro-British, or pro-Arab, or anti-Kurd were levelled at all and sundry, and in the limited time available I had no chance to unravel all the complex of personal antagonisms and rival interests involved. Iraqi-Kurdistan however is now a part of Iraq and it was highly interesting to see how in this new political situation the old antagonisms were being re-aligned to cope with wider issues on a more impersonal front.

Religious Organization

Religion is not a subject that the investigator can gain much information on in his first preliminary survey, and my own studies in this field were particularly slender.

*Cf. the feud between the Husseinis and the Nashashibis in Palestine today.